114 Fortunately, these gaps have now been filled by the work which M. Le Boulanger is publishing on the Laos of former days and the causes which resulted in our intervention in the upper basin of the Mékong at the end of the last century. His work is appearing at a most opportune moment, a time when Laos is being opened to the initiatives of colonization, a time when, thanks to the early works of general interest which were executed with a view towards its development, it is rapidly accelerating towards a brilliant future.

From an entirely different point of view, this study could not have appeared at a moment better calculated to help in solving the notorious question which has been the object of interminable controversy and is still topical: Is Laos a /iv/ protectorate, or is it a territory of French sovereignty, that is to say a colony in the strict sense?

M. Le Boulanger's book gives a very clear solution of the problem, at least as far as the kingdom of Luang-Prabang is concerned. In support of his demonstration, the author uses peremptory arguments which leave no further question as to the political status of our possession of the Upper Mékong.

114 From the double point of view of history and of simple justice,
643* Luang-Prabang is unquestionably a protectorate governed by a sovereign who enjoys his title and privileges by virtue of imprescriptible rights which are supported by customs and traditions six centuries old. To claim, as do those who hold the opposite theory, that by the sole effect of our volition this sovereign was invested with the privileges of royalty for reasons of political opportuneness and that before our intervention he was only a regional chieftain who had nothing in common with a prince endowed with royal majesty, is to defend a thesis contrary to historical reality and, it should be noted in passing, contrary to the interests of France in this remote part of our Asiatic domain.

114 /v/ M. Le Boulanger's work should henceforth settle this point of
127 history and put an end to a debate which has lasted only too long and the continuation of which would only result in provoking offenses and misunderstandings of such a nature as to alienate the sentiments of one of the populations of Indo-China which is the most loyally attached to us.

Far from neglecting the works of historians who have preceded him in the study of a past which is still nebulous, the author quotes from them frequently either to support their doctrines and opinions by means of the latest discoveries of archeology and epigraphy, or

else to correct errors in date or situate in their true place events of 114
which the date had still been uncertain. 127

But M. Le Boulanger has not been content merely with taking his documentation from the numerous works on Laos which have already appeared. He has endeavored to supplement it by profiting with patient fervor from the Laotian manuscripts in the Royal Library of Luang-Prabang, the Annals of the Imperial Palace at Hué, the archives of the former kingdom of Bassac and the collections of the "Vajiravudh Library" in Bangkok.

It is therefore a sincere book and one of good faith /vi/ which 114
the author is presenting to the public. It will be consulted with profit by all those who have an interest in the expansion of our influence in the Far East. It will provide precious material for our future administrators, on whom falls the task of pursuing in Laos the work of August Pavie and his valiant companions, those apostles of French civilization who made possible the peaceful conquest of the country and the faithful loyalty of its inhabitants.

In its capital, Laos is preparing to erect a monument to the memory of Auguste Pavie, a glorious memory which, together with that of the Doudart de Lagrées, the Lamys, and the de Foucaulds, is one of the purest in our colonial epic.

M. Le Boulanger's work comes at an auspicious time for paying living and pious homage to the founder of French Laos.

J. Bosc,
Superior Resident of Laos.

/vii/ AUTHOR'S NOTE

The present study makes no pretensions to dissipating the thick 114
mist which veils and will long veil the past of Lan-Xang, as long as no one can divest the Laotian chronicles of their legends and chaotic improbabilities. It tends simply to find a connection between the chief events of long ago, events which have been found by laborious researchers in more or less obscure documents, and which have heretofore been consigned to overly rare and highly scattered works.

To all those whose assistance, in various capacities, has enabled me to pursue and complete my audacious enterprise despite many obstacles, I here express my keenest gratitude:

To Prince Phetsarath, for the inestimable /viii/ documentation and true collaboration which he, with the kindest possible zeal, gave me;

I about the fourth century B.C. Cf. Le Kouen-louen et les
L anciennes navigations, 1919, and L. Finot, Les origines de
174 la colonisation indienne en Indo-chine.
114

At the same time, "large junks carrying hundreds of men (from the northeast) could, we must presume, have introduced certain industries into Indo-China... then, starting in the third century B.C., the Tsins who were the real founders of Chinese power and had given the empire its practically final limits, began to think of a sort of universal domination and gave to their relations, which had become more active, a character of conquest and study of neighboring countries..." (2).

2. Cf. ibid. Contested by P. Pelliot who, in the same study, claims that "the great migrations of men from the north in centuries which antedate our era belong to fiction and not to history."

Thus in this remote epoch there was foreshadowed a division of the peninsula into two zones of /20/ civilization, such as we have already observed in the Indo-China of today: the Chinese zone which will extend over the Annamite territory (which ten centuries of submission will profoundly "sinify"); and the Indian zone which will include Champa and Cambodia with its future extensions into the basins of the Mékong and the Ménam.

I /21/ CHAPTER III
L THE HISTORICAL PERIOD. -- THE BEGINNINGS
174
127 The Annals of the various Laotian kingdoms of the Mékong basin, supported by precise written evidence, mention events which did not begin until just before the fourteenth century of our era. For the earlier period we have only a rather small number of traditions and local legends. Thus in order to establish certain historical facts and try to show the connection between them, we must have recourse to the chronicles of neighboring lands which are all too often obscure and fabulous themselves. A great many hypotheses on this, so to speak, medieval epoch have been formulated, all of which are both possible and questionable. It is by trying to classify them and by taking inspiration from those which seem to be the most likely that the following guiding points have been established:

439 after a ten year reign without leaving any sons." He thus explicitly
643* contradicts the native documents which recount the many competitions
175* for the throne which had divided the royal family, and according to which the "present king" succeeded his uncle (Visai).

He adds that the government of the country was divided, under the
175* high authority of the king, between three great officials:
642
645 1. The head of the army who was "governor of the province which produces benzoin" and commander of the city of Vientiane. He doubtless refers to the prime minister Tian-Thala, the son-in-law of Souligna whom he calls Tevinia-Assen;

2. The governor of Nakhone or viceroy, who commanded the whole southern part of the kingdom, including Attopeu, as far as the Cambodian frontier. This was the Nan-Tharath of the Annals, whom he calls Lachaen;

3. The minister of the Palace who is in charge of relations with ambassadors.

These three high officials "were given /110/ an audience only every two or three months, unless there were some necessity or the king had them summoned expressly."

/693/ Next to the king there was a "tribunal in charge of civil and criminal affairs" which was composed of five of his relatives who had daily access to the sovereign.

/651 Finally, Van Wusthof estimates the king's income at "two piculs"
643/* per year of gum lac, benzoin and gold (1).

1. Cf. Georges Maspero, op. cit. /Un empire colonial francais: l'Indochine. Paris, 1929-1930./ A picul was equal to 61 kilograms.

175* The Account of Father Marini (1666). This evocation of the
114 Laotian kingdom in the seventeenth century does not differ appreciably, on the whole, from two travel accounts published in Italian at about the same time by the Jesuit fathers Martini (quoted p. 104, note 2) and Marini. A translation of the latter's accounts was placed on sale in Paris in 1666 (2). No matter how picturesque it may be in its

/127/ 2. Relation nouvelle et curieuse des royaumes de Tonquin et de Laos, traduite de l'italien du P. Marini Romain, par L.P.L.C.C. (F. Lecomte; cel.), a Paris, chez Gervais Clouzier, au Palais, sur les degres, en montant pour aller a

la Sainte-Chapelle, a la seconde boutique, a l'enseigne du Voyageur. 175* 114 /127/

naivete, the work /111/ does not have the ring of sincerity which constitutes the merit of the Dutch account. It was probably written from the reminiscences of Father J. M. Leria (1) and is of value

1. Father Giovanni-Maria Leria, a Piedmontese Jesuit, left Cambodia in April 1642 accompanied by some Cochinchinese neophytes with a caravan of Laotian traders who were returning to their country. He remained in Laos for five years "despite the opposition and the intrigues of the bonzes" and did not leave Vientiane until December 2, 1647. (Cf. Fr. Garnier, 1871, and Father Alex. de Rhodes, 1651.)

only as a document at second hand. It will nevertheless be of some interest to extract the following passages:

"In the East it (the kingdom of the 'Langiens') has the kingdom of Tonkin which stretches to the southwest towards Cochinchina, and further to the South that of Cambodia; in the southwest and the west the kingdom of Pegou; and in the north that of Ava and the province called U or Lu (2), and still further again to the north as 131 175*

2. See below, p. 176, note 1.

far as the frontiers which limit it in this direction, where there are certain peoples who are called Gnai. . . .

"Because of its fertility and because the things necessary to life are found there in abundance, the kingdom is so heavily populated that only a little while ago in the census which was taken of persons who were /112/ judged fit to serve the king at war and to bear arms, 500,000 were counted, not including the old people who are so numerous and so rubust that even of those who are a hundred years old a very large army might be formed for the defense of the kingdom if the need should arise. . . 421 433 161

"The chief city and the one in which the king ordinarily stays is situated in the middle of the kingdom, eighteen degrees toward our Arctic pole, and is called Langiome. It has good moats and extremely high walls on one side, and on the other the great river to defend it against the undertakings of enemies. . . . The royal palace, the structure and symmetry of which are admirable, can 633 174 344

648* 643* 175* Ong-Hue cared only about receiving his tribute, and therefore straightway abandoned his protege, whose life and liberty Ong-Lo had spared, and received his "vassal" with all the regard due to his rank.

Severance of Bassac. His authority does not seem to have gained any greater acceptance in the southern provinces, if we dare refer to the unconnected and improbably manuscripts which constitute what have come to be called the Annals of Bassac. The prince who /147/ governed this latter country from 1713 to 1747, Chao-Soi-Sisamout by name, clearly seems to have turned to Siam and Cambodia, while Ong-Hue was powerless to expose himself in his turn to the risks which Setthathirath had once run in a hazardous and distant expedition. He had to bow helplessly before this new consequence of the schism in order to concentrate all his attention on Luang-Prabang, where his cousins King-Kitsarath, Intha-Som and Khamone-Noi were agitating "for the crown" (1). He died around 1735 without having

1. See below, "Luang-Prabang," p. 179 ff.

had a chance to intervene in the affairs of the dissenting principality (2).

127 174 2. Since the chronicles of Vientiane were completely destroyed when the city was sacked in 1828, the events which marked the last century of the kingdom's existence are known only through the Annals of the neighboring States. The country, emptied of its inhabitants, has preserved no oral tradition and no exact memory of this period of decadence. The result is that no claim for rigorous exactitude can be made even for the dates of the different reigns which are indicated in the course of the present study. Most of them were arrived at by trial and error and are given with reservations.

ONG-LONG, KING 1735-1760.

643* 648* 175* His son Ong-Long succeeded him. The first years of his reign do not seem to have been troubled by the age-old struggle between the /148/ Burmese and the Pegouans, which had nevertheless flared up suddenly and threatened to overflow into the neighboring States.

has created a center for the study of Laos which will enable the country to be better known and better loved. From these works new elements will arise which will serve as a base for more detailed works which the reader can study to his advantage, while awaiting the publication of a new edition of this modest tract, whose only ambition is to increase the understanding of the habits, customs, and traditions of the Muong Lao. 114

May we express here our profound gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince Savang Vathana, heir to the throne, for the friendly interest he has ever shown in our work. We express our thanks to His Highness Boun Oum, Prince of Champassak, who has kindly pointed out to us monuments till now unknown. To L. L. E. E. Thao Kou Abhay, president of the King's Council and to Thao Nhouy Abhay, former minister, we are also indebted for certain information for which we are grateful. We thank Mr. Michaudel for the friendly and constant help he has given to the French School [5] of the Far East in Laos, and we also thank Mr. Malleret, director of this school, who has made useful suggestions. Finally, we express our thanks to Prince Souvanna Phouma and to the Princess for the consideration they have shown us on many occasions and for the encouragement they have given to this work. 122

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[7]

HISTORICAL SKETCH

"... Then, Phou Lan Xon, messenger of Phaya Then, king of the sky, took a red-hot iron and pierced the gourd. Immediately a crowd of men sprang forth. There were so many that the opening was not large enough to let them through, so larger openings were made with scissors." 173 563

Such is the origin of the two groups of people of Laos. The Khas, who came out of the opening made by the red-hot iron, were blackened by the cinders; the Thais, who came through holes made by scissors, kept their fair complexion.

However original, this charming legend is far from giving us precise information about the first inhabitants of Laos. As a famous scholar has already bitterly remarked, it is the beginnings about which we know the least. Alas, Laos is no exception to this rule. The historian who attempts to retrace the events which have occurred in this country from the origins to the 13th century, at which period documents with substantial proofs are available, finds himself in much the same position as an ant lost in a sieve. The holes are more 127

127 numerous than the solid paths.

For ancient documents are indeed rare. As in Cambodia, one has to admit that the manuscripts of Laos, written in chalk on blackened skins or carved with a stylus on palm leaves, have resisted neither the passage of time nor termites. As for inscriptions, they only appear during [8] the sixth century A. D., and even they are of Khmer origin, the first inscription in Thai writing dating only from A. D. 1292 in the reign of Rama Kamhèng of Soukhodaya.

What then remains for us? Fortunately the earth has preserved what the memory of man has forgotten. Prehistoric studies and archeology enable us partially to fill in certain gaps. Let us therefore examine the documents they provide and find out from them what we can learn of the past of the Muong Lao.

ANTECEDENTS OF LAOS. PREHISTORIC PERIOD.

172 The most ancient vestiges of civilization which have so far been found in Laos are located in three well-defined regions:

A) Region of Luang Prabang.

During the year 1940 Mr. Paul Lévy discovered a prehistoric deposit of exceptional importance because of its extent, the abundance of stone material and the composition of this material. This discovery was made in the immediate neighborhood of Luang Prabang (villages of Xieng-Lek, of Phon-Muat and of Pha-Khom). This area has always been inhabited since the time when man's only tools were roughly chipped pebbles. But the paleolithic study of Indochina is interesting in showing that in Indochina, as in the valley of the Somme, man of the most remote prehistoric epochs already lived on the banks of rivers (Lévy). This epoch is characterized by tools of worked stone and by the almost complete absence of pottery. In Indochina this period is usually called the Hoabinian epoch, because the first tools of this type were found in the grottoes of Hoa-binh (Southern Tonkin). We may [9] mention that the human remains found on Hoabinian sites show characteristics which relate them to Australian and Papuan-Melanesian races. But all this is still in an embryonic state and should not lead to any conclusions without observing the greatest prudence.

B) Province of Kham-mouane.

The findings of Madeleine Colani in the grottoes of Mahaxay bring us more reliable information. These natural shelters are undoubtedly necropolises; the furnishings are poor, but they reveal two series of facts.